

TITLE: **The Fisheries Information Network (FIN) – A Regional Component of the Fisheries Information System (FIS)**

AUTHOR: David Donaldson, Data Program Manager
Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission (GSMFC)

PRESENTER: David Donaldson

OBJECTIVE: Provide basic overview of the FIN program, outlining why the program was established, goals of the program, how the program organized and recent activities conducted via the program

ABSTRACT:

The Fisheries Information Network (FIN) is a state-federal cooperative program to collect, manage, and disseminate statistical data and information on the marine commercial and recreational fisheries of the Southeast Region.¹ The FIN consists of two components: Commercial Fisheries Information Network (ComFIN) and the Southeast Recreational Fisheries Information Network [RecFIN(SE)].

Efforts by state and federal agencies to develop a cooperative program for the collection and management of commercial and recreational fishery data in the Southeast Region began in the late 1980s. The reason for these efforts was the presence of a variety of issues and problems concerning data collection and management in the Region including incompatibility or inconsistency among state and federal data bases; duplication and conflicts among these surveys; need for improvements in catch and effort and catch statistics; lack of recreational shellfish and crustaceans data as well as highly migratory species and "rare-event" catches information; need to improve length frequencies and catch-at-age by time/area strata data; lack of sufficient data about discarded catch and the disposition of landed catch; lack of catch and effort data regarding recreational fishing tournament catches; lack of social and economic data on recreational and commercial fisheries; inability of access and analyze most fisheries survey data bases; and absence of a common forum for concerned agencies to plan, coordinate, and evaluate data collection and management activities. The FIN was designed to address these through cooperative planning, innovative uses of statistical theory and design, and consolidation of appropriate data into a useful data base system.

The mission of the FIN is to cooperatively collect, manage, and disseminate marine commercial, anadromous and recreational fishery data and information for the conservation and management of fishery resources in the Region and to support the development of a national program.

The FIN consists of the representatives from the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, Florida Department of Environmental Protection, Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries, Mississippi Department of Marine Resources, Puerto Rico Department of

¹ The Southeast Region (the Region) includes Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, Puerto Rico, South Carolina, Texas, and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

Environmental and Natural Resources, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, U.S. Virgin Islands Department of Planning and Natural Resources, National Marine Fisheries Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, National Park Service, Caribbean Fishery Management Council, Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council and Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission. The FIN “belongs” to no single organization, rather it represents all of the coastal partners involved in this regional program.

One of the goals of FIN is to support the development of a national program. It should be noted that the FIN was designed to be the Gulf regional component of the Fisheries Information System (FIS). In the *1998 Proposed Implementation of a Fishing Vessel Registration and Fisheries Information System Report to Congress*, it states:

“It is important to understand that the proposed FIS model is not a radical departure from the structure and content of existing regional systems. Planning for the FIS largely assumes that most of the existing systems will remain the same or will be modified somewhat to create the necessary intra-regional and national linkages. The purpose of this project is not to replace existing data systems that are successful, but to build and improve upon them.”

Regional cooperative programs such as FIN, Atlantic Coastal Cooperative Statistics Program (ACCSP), Pacific Fisheries Information Network (PacFIN) and Pacific Recreational Fisheries Information Network (Pacific RecFIN) were designed over a number of years by the various program partners. These programs utilized the experiences of all the partners to develop cooperative systems to address the data collection and management needs of the various regions. The FIS needs to make the most of these regional programs and not “reinvent the wheel” by developing new programs but instead use the existing regional infrastructures to implement FIS.

The program operations are organized in a modular fashion. There are several modules under FIN and each module was designed utilizing the same process: program level data standards development - design and procedures; program level data management structure development; legislative/regulatory action; individual partner data management development; individual partner program implementation; and evaluation of components. The FIN program has worked closely with Atlantic Coastal Cooperative Statistics Program (ACCSP) to ensure the both programs are compatibility (where possible) to assist in the implementation of the national FIS program. Some of the recent activities under the FIN include:

- ***Collecting, Managing and Disseminating Marine Recreational Fisheries Data***, which provides for the conduct of the MRFSS survey in Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and Florida for shore, for-hire, and private modes and for-hire field intercepts in Texas. It includes the coordination of the survey, an intercept survey of shore, for-hire and private boat anglers to estimate angler catch using the existing MRFSS methodology, and entry of the data. The states also conduct weekly telephone calls to a 10% random sample of the Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and Florida charter and 25% random sample of head boat captains to obtain estimates of charter and head boat fishing effort.

- ***Head Boat Port Sampling in Texas, Louisiana, Alabama and Florida***, which provides for the sampling of catches, collection of catch reports from head boat personnel, and gathering effort data on head boats which operate primarily in the Exclusive Economic Zone from ports along the coasts of Texas, Louisiana, and Florida. In addition, a pilot survey is being conducted in Alabama to test the at-sea sampling methods for collecting catch and bycatch data from this sector.
- ***Gulf Menhaden Port Sampling***, which provides for sampling of gulf menhaden catches from menhaden purse-seine vessels that operate at in Louisiana. Samples are processed for size and age composition for use in coast-wide stock assessments. In turn, gulf menhaden stock assessments are incorporated into the Fisheries Management Plan for the species, and are also utilized by the Gulf Coast states, the GSMFC, the menhaden industry, and the NMFS.
- ***Development and Implementation of FIN Data Management System***, which provides for further implementation of the data management system for the FIN. It provides funding for the FIN Data Base Manager and ComFIN Survey Coordinator. Responsibilities include further development of data modules structures; routine loading of Louisiana, Mississippi (oyster only) Alabama, and Florida commercial catch effort data, Gulf biological data, Gulf recreational data; and maintenance of DMS.
- ***Trip Ticket Program Development and Operation***, which provides for the further development and implementation of a commercial trip ticket system for Mississippi. This task provides for continued development and implementation of components for a commercial trip ticket system to census the commercial fisheries landings in Mississippi, using the data elements and standards developed by the ComFIN. It also provided funding for Louisiana and Alabama to operate their trip ticket programs. In addition, it provides funding to contract for implementation and operation of electronic trip ticket reporting. It will ultimately be combined with other commercial fisheries data collected from around the Gulf of Mexico. Texas is evaluating the feasibility of implementing a trip ticket system in their state.
- ***Biological Sampling***, which provides funding for collection of biological data from the recreational and commercial fisheries. These data are essential to accurately assessing the status of commercial and recreational species such as red snapper, king mackerel, gulf and southern flounder, and greater amberjack. For the commercial aspects, port sampling collect this information based on established guidelines. For the recreational side, samplers go to sites and collect the necessary biological data using a modified MRFSS method.